



Research Paper

Dimapur Monoliths: An Enigma of History

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Abstract: Many events and characters of history are enigmatic. It is not possible to recover a complete picture of the history of any society or time. No incidents or events leave behind smooth and full evidences of them. There are many questions in history for which we do not have proper answers so far. Same is the case with the monoliths of Dimapur of Nagaland State which is situated in North-East India.

The monolithic pillars of Dimapur have similar characteristics of the megalithic menhirs which are noticed in hilly areas of all over North-east India from time immemorial. These are presumed to be victory pillars or memorial stones over burials of important persons of the Kachhari kingdom existed in the past. There is a possibility that these pillars belong to the Pre-Ahom period. This conjecture can be made on the basis of the style of art and architecture of these pillars. These may be the traditional monuments of the tribes used to live at that place or the votive stupas of the Buddhist faith. The Kachhari king patronized to construct these pillars with the help of the master artists brought from abroad, probably from Orissa. In this short paper it has been attempted to provide new interpretations regarding the date, shape, cause of installation and other features of these monoliths.

Key Words: Enigmatic, monolith, pillars, Dimapur, burials, stupas.

Received 02 Mar, 2021; Revised: 12 Mar, 2021; Accepted 14 Mar, 2021 © The author(s) 2021. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many mysteries and puzzles in human history which are still waiting solutions. Many questions in history are there unexplained and unanswered by the historians. Varied interpretations are available to the same question or problem. Well established interpretation to the problem still waits.

The puzzle regarding the Indus Valley Civilization scripts still remained a puzzle after about one hundred years of discovery of the civilization in the Indian sub-continent. Many scholars of epigraphy around the world like I. Mahadevan, Asko Parpola, etc. have been trying their best to decipher this pictographic script. Even Assamese archaeologist Rajmohan Nath had also tried to decipher this script more than fifty years ago. He had a complete book on this script to his credit.

Dimapur, at present the most important business town of Nagaland, was once a capital of the Kachari kings who were also inclined to Hindu religion. Here we find the famous monolithic pillars which were supposed to be constructed by the Kachari rulers.

Statement of the Problem

The monolithic pillars of Dimapur ruins pose another enigma of history to the historians and archaeologists. What is the purpose of construction of these pillars? Why these are installed in concentrated clusters? Who were the artists of these pillars? These were actually parts of some grand architecture? Well established answers to these questions are still absent.

Date of the Monoliths

Dimapur is at present an important town of Nagaland on the southeast border of Assam. Here once in the medieval age the Kacharis established the capital of their kingdom. It is said that the fourth Kachari king Chakradhvaj erected the city of Dimapur. Kala Pahar, an invader from Bengal, is considered responsible for its destruction. The Kachari Rajbari ruins are situated about 1 k.m. away towards the east of modern Dimapur town. Mr. Grange had visited the area in 1839. He was the first European to describe these ruins. Historian Sir Edward Gait opines that the ruins of Dimapur show that, at that period, the Kacharis had attained a state of

civilization considerably in advance of that of the Ahoms who ruled about six hundred years in medieval Assam. From the style of the art and architecture of them the date of these pillars can be pushed back to the Pre-Ahom period of the history of Assam. These are probably contemporary with the temple ruins of Deopahar at Numaligarh and Madankamdev.

Art and architecture of the Monoliths

Three original boundary walls were protecting the Rajbari on the eastern, northern and the western side. On the southern side Dhansiri river was giving the protection from enemies. Earlier there was a boundary wall on the southern side also, but that was washed away by the river. At present modern boundary walls erected on all four sides are protecting the Rajbari ruins. Already some of the ancient treasures of the Kacharis are vandalized and dilapidated. On the eastern side the imposing arched gateway is situated. It is made of bricks. The gateway was a later addition to the complex. It is interesting to note that the use of bricks was not known to the contemporary Ahoms. Later on same type of bricks were used by the Ahoms in their architecture.

The main attraction of the Rajbari ruins is the stone pillars. They are in hundreds. These are found in three clusters. The pillars of the cluster near the gate on the eastern side are in alignment. Here 14 pillars in two rows are intact. The pillars of the cluster near the southern wall are not in alignment and are almost in ruins. The pillars of the cluster in the north-western corner of the boundary wall have not made any alignment only four pillars are intact among them. One pond, probably old, is situated on the western side of the complex of the Rajbari ruins. One pillar standing alone in the south-west corner of the boundary wall is the biggest in the complex. This will be around 12 feet in height. The shape of this pillar is slightly different from that of others and this may symbolize the most important person or event among all the pillars.

They are monolithic that means made from one piece of stone and are gigantic in size. Some say they are mushroom pillars or chessman pillars considering their shape. Almost all pillars are round. There are also a few pillars which are square. Though the pillars vary in height, largely they are 8 feet to 9 feet. These are carved out of sand stone. According to historian Gait sandstone for these pillars could have been quarried at least ten miles away from the Rajbari.

Similar designs and patterns are found in all the pillars. Peacock and horse are frequently depicted. Decorative geometrical designs are mostly wheels. These motifs and designs are usually depicted in Hindu art and architecture.

Different interpretations

The pillars mentioned above constitute the enigma of Dimapur ruins. These pillars can be considered as the phallic images. They indicate the symbol of fertility. Perhaps these pillars are nothing but the well curved Shiva *lingas*. So it can be conjectured that this place was once populated by Shaiva people. People and the kings were great devotees of Shiva and they worshipped Shiva in phallic form. The kings as saviours to the people in crisis installed these pillars as a mark of *bhakti*(devotion) to god Shiva, one of the *trimurti*(Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha) of the Hindu pantheon.

We can compare these monoliths with British Stonehenge and megalithic menhirs. Menhirs(upright stone slabs) make quite a common scene in the hilly areas of the North-East. Perhaps the Rajbari was a burial ground for important personalities of the Kacharis. Stone pillars were the memorial stones on the burials.

One interesting interpretation regarding these pillars is provided by archaeologist Rajmohan Nath. According to Nath, Dimapur monoliths are triumphal monuments. As a mark of victory a big stone pillar representing the Kachhari king was installed and many small stone triumphal pillars corresponding to the number of chiefs defeated were also installed inside the complex.

Perhaps some sort of traditions was prevalent at that time among the folks for making pillar like structures in wood. For giving permanent forms of these the king got these made in stone with the master artisans brought from Orissa. A tradition of wood carving is still current among the tribes of Nagaland. Animistic faith of Naga tribes also might have been associated with these pillars.

Another interpretation regarding these pillars may be put forward associating these with religious aspects. These were probably votive *stupas* of the Buddhist faith. Once this place might had been a transit point of the Buddhist monks who used to take some rest at this place on their sojourn from Bihar and Bengal to South-East Asia and vice versa. These may have South-East Asia connection. These are perhaps not wild conjectures. As long as proper answers to historical riddles are not found historical imaginations and conjectures of a few bold historians are necessary for leading to the destinations of historical facts.

II. CONCLUSION

Folk elements are intermingled with Hindu traditions on the monoliths of Dimapur. Hindu religion entered this region even in ancient period though people of Nagaland did not embrace Hinduism from Hinduised Kachharis. Dimapur ruins or monoliths belong to Pre-Ahom or pre-medieval period. This can be surmised on

the basis of the type of curving of monuments on the stone. The monoliths can be dated as around 1000 A.D. old. All are almost in the uniform style of construction. These seem to be related to the folk beliefs to a certain extent.

It is obvious that without royal patronage this sort of construction in grand scale was not possible. Another important question remained unanswered is- who are the architects and sculptors of these monuments? Probably the artisans were brought from Orissa and other regions of north India. As skilled artisans were not available here at that time, some of them might have been locally trained.

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